

## Challenges in using contemporary Digital Tools in media relations practice in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

This research conceptually investigates the importance, prospects and challenges of using contemporary digital technology in media relations functions of public relations practitioners as outlined by earlier scholars. Media relations is significant to the public relations practitioner because public relations as a function looks at maintaining a relationship that is mutually beneficial to both the organisation and the public, media relation, on the other hand, lays emphasis on a mutual relationship between an organisation and the media in order to serve the interests of both the organisation and the public. The world is moving digitally where there is a convergence of technologies used in communication. This paper attempts to review the tools and how relevance these new media technologies are, as well as the challenges public relations practitioners, encounter in their adoption of these technologies in their media relations functions. The research points out that some new media technologies like the internet (websites, email, social media, blogs), video news releases, webcasting, videoconferencing etc. are in some way interconnected with the diverse media of communication due to technological innovations and media convergence, and have today transformed media relations practice universally notwithstanding the myriads of issues such as high cost of new technologies, cyber security, corruption, low level of internet penetration, poor funding, lack of training opportunities, epileptic power supply and other challenges not captured in this study all posing as challenges to the effective application media relations practice by PR practitioners in Nigeria. It is believed that the government and all stakeholders will pull resources together so that media relations practice in Nigeria will improve significantly and hopefully in the not too distant future be at par with what is obtainable in developed countries.

**Key words:** Media Relations, Public Relations, Media, Nigeria, Digital, New Media

### 1. Introduction

Public relations practices have grown globally over time. In advanced countries, most organisations make use of public relations practitioners to manage and launder their image to achieve a favourable perception with their publics. Digital equipment and technologies have greatly improved how public relations is practiced. The internet and its streaming capabilities have ensured that organizational events can be streamed live as they happen globally instead of the former practice of maybe paying a broadcaster for live broadcast.

In underdeveloped countries like Nigeria, public relations practice has not developed like in the Western nations. A lot of factors come into play such as; mode of conducting business, expertise, education, technological deficiencies, cost, corruption, dictatorship, adoption of new media etc. We shall attempt to outline some of these digital tools and the challenges of applying them in public relations practice in Nigeria.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) define public relations as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (p. 4). The Public Relations Society of America (2011) defines public relations as a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Ikpe and Olise (2010) elaborately defines public relations as a process / business of studying public attitudes, executing programmes of action and relaying information to the publics through a channels / medium / media, so as to earn public acceptance and good will.

In today’s digital world, Tannahil (2015) states that Lewis PR provides a more encompassing definition. They define public relations as a seamless integration across multiple channels. They point out that success brands know there is a multiplier effect when PR and digital marketing work hand in hand, ensuring continuity across channels and around the world.

Thus, public relations does not just involve maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between organisations and their publics, the platform used for maintaining these relationships is also essentially important as it must be

favourably disposed to the organisation. Most communication platforms globally are now digital and mobile; it will self-destruct for an organisation not to key into these contemporary equipment and platforms such as videoconferencing, mailing list, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Skype etc.

It is the duty of the public relations practitioner to ensure that the appropriate channels or a combination of channels of reaching the target publics are employed from various choices of channels. The public relations practitioner has a multitude of channels to choose from in order to execute his/her job/duties/campaign but according to Ikpe and Olise (2010), the media is the most prominent and common channel the PR practitioner can employ in reaching his target audience.

However, since there are several media outlets from the print, broadcast, online media, all transforming daily, with increased advancement in technology, the Public Relations practitioner has the task of maintaining credibility and mutual relationship with the appropriate media so as to reach their public not just effectively but also positively and efficiently. This is where the concept of media relations in public relations is applied (Ikpe & Olise, 2010).

Igben (1997) gives the definition of media relations as a “persistent interaction with the media of communication in order to maintain an exchange of newsworthy confidence and sustained public information.” Baran (2004) posits that media relation requires that the “public relations professional maintain a good relationship with professionals in the media, understand their deadlines and other restraints and earn their trust.” Biagi (2005) opines that media relations is contacting news media, freelance writers and trade publications with the intent of getting them to publish or broadcast news and features about or originated by the organizations. Hanson (2005) does add that media relations “is a two-way interaction with members of the press”, broadcast and online media – new media. Tench and Yeomans (2006) assert that media relations involve “managing relationships with media - all the writers and producers who contribute to and control what appears in the print, broadcast, and online media.”

Media relations has the capacity to reduce ignorance as it concerns any organization. It can also prevent a crisis in any society as well as ensures that the reputation of an organization is enhanced to boost public confidence (Ikpe & Olise, 2010). Media relations in this regard provides timely and precise information about an organisation and its issues that are of interest to the public.

Blond et al. (1996) as cited in Tench and Yeomans (2006) write that the purpose of media relations is not to issue press release, or handle enquiries from journalists, or even to generate a massive file of press cutting. The true purpose of media relations, they state is to enhance the reputation of an organization and its products and to influence and inform the target audiences. Nonetheless, Holtz (2002) argues that the role of an organizational media relations department is not to make the company look good in the press, nor it is to keep the company out of the newspaper.

From the above narratives, we can infer that media relations is a two-way communication process that brings together the employer or clients of the public relations practitioner with their target public(s) through various media organisations. It can also be seen from the point of view of establishing cordial relations with media gatekeepers in order for them to be packaged and presented favourably in their analysis and discourse on their medium so as to boost their public image. This paper looks at some of the challenges faced by public relations practitioners In Nigeria in their adoption of contemporary digital technologies in maintaining media relations for the organisations they represent.

## **2. Theoretical review**

This paper is hinged on two communication theories that appropriately fit the context of the study, they are; the new media theory and technological determinism theory.

Mcquail (2010) talks about the difficulty in defining the term “new media”, such that the editors of the Handbook of New Media (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006) chose to define them in a composite way, “linking information communication technologies (ICT) with their associated social contexts, bringing together three elements: technological artefacts and devices, activities, practices and uses; and social arrangements and organizations that form around the devices and practices” (p.39). New media in this context refers to new technologies of communication-based on the convergence of satellite and communication; as well as new modes of using them. We can consider new media to include some websites and social media sites like Muck Rach, Meltwater, Mention, Coverage Book, Cision, Instagram, Pinterest, Brand 24, Skype, YouTube and a host of many others.

Technological Determinism theory (TD), simply put, is the idea that technology has an important effect on how the media contents are disseminated to the audience. The theory was propounded in 1964 by Marshall McLuhan. According to McLuhan (1964), “technological determinism” is a theory which states that the characteristics inherent in a new technology govern the direction of its development and sets the conditions for social change. McLuhan's notion of a global village is based on characteristics inherent in electronic media, including the elimination of time and space barriers in the communication process.

Thus, media relations practitioners must understand the inherent technicalities and challenges that come with the adoption of these contemporary media technologies. They must understand concepts such mailing lists, social media branding, search engine optimization, etc as it affects the organization they represent in their relations with the media which must be sustained and maintained mutually.

## **2.1 Relevance of New Media technologies in media relations**

Lifvergren (2011) posits that new media is a term that applies to the modern media of its time, which in the 1950's includes the television and today is the Internet. “New” media is a relative concept. What is new today is old tomorrow thanks to the rapid invention, globalization, and mass consumption of anything deemed even remotely entertaining by youth.

Olise (2008) opines that new media have to do with the convergence of computer and telecommunications technologies. That is, they are new communication technologies that combine the computers and telecommunication technologies and are used as channels for the dissemination of information to a heterogeneous audience regardless of time, space and distance.

He further adds that there are different examples of new media such as the Internet, mobile phones, videoconferencing, e-mail, chat rooms, online newspapers/ news magazines among a host of others.

The use of these different types of new media has revolutionized media relations practice in the 21st century. Media relations practitioners using new media can work more smartly; effectively and efficiently at a greater speed, creativity, and better accuracy. We will attempt to point out some highlights of new media relevance to the media relations practitioner. Ikpe and Olise (2010) loosely include the following as new media's relevance to media relation;

### **2.1.1 Boosts transformation of a favourable image**

In today's IT-driven world, the fact that an organization has a website can improve the image of the organization not to talk of having an attractive, well organized and constantly updated websites. Moreover, having a website encourages international recognition. This is because a website is seen as the doorway into an organisation especially one that hundreds or thousands of miles from the individual. It gives that organisation some credence of being real and identifiable. This is so because, virtually all websites contain some way of reaching the organisation, either a physical address, a telephone number, an email address, a contact us form and even in some cases names, pictures and profiles of the executives of the organisation. This already gives the organisation a global face. In Nigeria for example, it is a prerequisite for NGOs seeking international collaboration to own a website where their future partners can see some of their activities. In such a case, the website has helped to create a favourable and positive image for the organisation in question.

### **2.1.2 Promotes two-way communication**

Part of the fundamental characteristic of the new media is that it creates immediate feedback for the organisation. On the social media, the public can let an organisation know how it feels about a particular action or policy of an organisation. The reactions are almost immediate, whether positive or negative, it can take the form of posting and likes on Facebook walls; Twitter mentions, retweets, likes; phone calls and emails to the organisation; or comments on Youtube videos and channels of the organisation concerned.

Ayankajo (2001) recalls that “there are chat rooms for virtual discussion where users have opportunities to talk on-line” with the organizations who have websites (p.211). A message typed and sent to a chat room appears almost at the same time on the computers of other users in the same chat room, 24hours daily. In furtherance, Rodney (2005) postulates that the web (internet) is interactive in nature. This interactivity gives room for a continuous back and forth feedbacks between the participants in this case the organisation and the public.

### **2.1.3 Ease assessment of current corporate image position**

New media technology has helped the public in making their own opinion about how they perceive an organization. Adedina, Adeniyi and Bolaji (2008) rightly state that “the feedback mechanism in addition to the task on organizations and other bodies on the net to justify their actions and also explain their mission as well as their reactions on issues have made human communication a more robust activity” (p.297). Indeed, new media make it easier for organizations to be aware of what their publics think about their corporate image so as not to face the danger of having a false assumption that they are favourable disposed to their public. Since most new

media have this feedback mechanism they can be used to relay to organizations what their publics really think about them. This, in turn, can assist in pre-empting and eliminating misunderstanding and crisis that could have arisen.

#### **2.1.4 Offer ubiquity**

The new media has an omnipresence nature today. It virtually follows us everywhere; it can be in our pocket like a mobile device, our palms like a tablet, homes, and offices like a computer/laptop and even on our wrists in the form of smart watches. Ike (2005) believes that the new communication technologies are often projected as a benefit to democracy because they permit greater citizen involvement. There is a generality and inclusiveness when it comes to the new media, everyone can be heard.

Similarly, new media when applied in media relations, ensure greater involvement of the media because they are virtually everywhere. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) assert that the internet represents the most ubiquitous leading edge of what is a communication revolution. In essence, media relation professionals using the new media like the Internet, mobile phones etc. would affect everyone in their societies.

Ikpe and Olise (2010) argue that although several scholars have argued if the ubiquity nature of new media is a good thing; media relations practitioners would see it as a good thing especially since the new media are veritable tools which would enable them to communicate with different journalist from different media organization no matter where they are because new media are everywhere.

#### **2.1.5 Ease in planning and implementation of media relations**

New media make the media relations process easier, faster and cheaper to a large extent. Rodney (2005) points out that the e-mail and electronic bulletins board, for example, can transmit a message back to the source in a matter of seconds. The media relations practitioners can use the Internet to carry out quick and cost effective research. After implementing media relations policies, those involved in the process can use new media to get feedback on how well the process is progressing. News releases can be sent to the media houses through new media technologies like the e-mail, mobile phone etc. All these are done faster, easier and cheaper with the aid of the new media than the traditional means.

Furthermore, new media eliminate the problem of distance and time as barriers to communication. Organisations not bucking the trend will only find themselves to blame as they run the risk of being left behind and locked out of our world today that is seen as a global village.

### **2.2 Media relations strategies**

Organizations globally as well as media relations practitioners must adopt different strategies to be able to survive and succeed in this globally competitive world. Thus, it, therefore, behooves on organizations' media relations department to map out effective strategies for effective media relations practice. Essentially, media relations should be planned and implemented based on certain rules, principles, and guidelines Ikpe and Olise (2010). Tench and Yeomans (2006) provide some basic rules for effective media relations practices by PR practitioners:

- I. Act as a service to the media: answer questions, return calls before deadlines, provide information and context.
- II. Accept the independence of the media; do not offer payment or inducement, do not ask for copy approval
- III. Disclose your interest, that is, let the journalists know who you represent.
- IV. Be available to the media when the news is bad as when you have good news to promote.

Bivin (2008) advises that in dealing with the media, the organization's media relations department should not bombard journalist with a daily barrage of press releases. This is because reporters and editors who you bombard with such releases know this and are likely to stop releasing your information because they are saturated with the organization's releases. Cutlip et al. (2006) provide some guidelines for good media relations as follows:

I. Shoot Squarely: Shooting squarely begins with honesty and truth when dealing with the media. This gives the organisation credibility which they have to earn usually over a period of time. If for some legal or legislative reason they are unauthorized from commenting, it is better to make no comment.

II. Give Services: The quickest and surest way to give the cooperation of journalist is to promote them with newsworthy, interesting and timely stories, and pictures that they want when they want them and in a form they can readily use. This is easier today with social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram.

III. Do not Beg or Carp: Nothing irritates journalist and editors as well as news directors more than the practitioners who beg to have stories used or complain about story treatment and placement. If information is not sufficiently newsworthy on its own merit, to attract their interest, no amount of begging or carping can change the quality of that information.

IV. Do not Ask for Kills: Public relations practitioners have no right to ask the media to suppress or kill a story. It is seen as an insult and trying to usurp or intimidate the media gatekeepers. However, if the media report inaccurate or misleading story, ask for a correction, retraction, and/or apology.

V. Do not Flood the Media: It is advised that you stick to what journalist will consider news, keep media mailing hot, current and send the most appropriate journalist at each news media.

Furthermore, Ikpe and Olise (2010) enjoin every organization's media relations department to conduct surveys to find out not just the objective of the media relations practice but also the problem if any. They should decide what the message should be and which channel/ contemporary tool to use for the dissemination of the message to the media.

They must also evaluate the entire process. In fact, the media relations department should plan the media relations process very well. This is because planning would eliminate unnecessary work, improve work efficiency, ensure that the objectives are achieved, demonstrates value for money and avoid any possible crisis in the future. Above all, planning through the adoption of effective media relations strategies would help to reduce the challenges that may arise due to the changing trends in new media technologies.

### **3. Contemporary tools for media relations**

The main goal of media relations is to create and maintain mutual understand between an organisation and the media in general. This helps to foster good relations with the media gate keepers. In order to do this, it is essential to keep up with changing times and technologies. Today, information dissemination is nearly instantaneous. Therefore, the public relations practitioner must ensure he is adequately prepared and knowledgeable in the use of the latest tool in his profession to meet up the rigorous challenges that come with media relations practice in the 21st century.

However, Ikpe and Olise (2010) rightly point out that this is not to say that these contemporary tools have replaced the 'old' tools but are used to complement each other for effective relations with the media. This is so because, although we may regard a technology as "new", it is, however, merely an extension of the older media. Writing did not replace speech; television did not replace radio; E-books did not replace traditional books, in the same paradigm, the traditional media relation tools like the newspaper, radio and television have not been replaced by newer media relation tools like websites, email, videoconferencing, social media etc. Rather, the relation is an integration and convergence of media sources where public relations practitioners embed elements of the traditional media relation tools in contemporary digital tools in their PR practices.

To this end, Ajala (2005) as cited in Ikpe and Olise (2010) provides some insight into factors PR practitioner should consider in making the right choices in the tool(s) to employ. Some of these factors include "the media profile, the target public profile, time factor, competition and cost of the tool." All these factors if properly harnessed are very capable of guiding the media relations department of any organization in choosing any of these contemporary tools for media relations. These tools include; the internet, videoconference, webcasting, Video News Releases, facility visits, periodicals, and dailies. We shall discuss them individually below.

#### **3.1 Internet**

The Internet has ushered in a new age for media relations practice. The Internet – referred to as a network of interconnected computer networks. It is an information superhighway by its nature of converging with many other technologies incorporates other types of media relations tools commonly referred to as online media relations. We shall look at the internet in relation to its components that are applicable in media relations practice. The components we can include here are websites, electronic mail, and social media. Their operation is based solely on the internet.

##### **3.1.1 A. Website**

A website is a location connected to the internet that maintains one or more web pages. It could also be a collection of related web pages including multimedia content, typically identified with a common domain name and published on at least one server. Organisations, in this case, will own a website with a unique domain name. The website will serve as a virtual address for the organisation and will also serve as the first point of news source for the media. Any reputable organisation today regularly updates their website daily or several times a daily as events keep unfolding. An organisation that does not update its website is seen as unserious or one that has something to hide from the media and public in general, an organisation that does not have a website on the hand is regarded as not ready for business in the world of today.

Ikpe and Olise (2010) inform that today, several organizations have corporate homepage and websites with informative and persuasive details about their products/services and the image of the organization is communicated to the media and their publics across the globe. This underscores why Onabajo (2005) notes that a

professional website will improve an organizations' image and enhance communication. He, however, advises that in creating an organizational website, the public relations/media relations department should ensure that the website designed for the organization exploits the interactive nature of the Internet, and enable a two-way flow of messages because getting information from the target audience is as important as informing them.

Some ways of achieving this objective include having website newsroom, online newsletters, online news releases, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), online monitoring, Contact us section with a physical address, email address, and phone number(s) among a host of others. The list certainly, would be inexhaustible because daily new ones are emerging and this would continue as long as man is existence.

### 3.1.2 B. Email

The Electronic mail or commonly E-mail is a method of exchanging digital messages from one author to one or more recipients. In media relations, releases or interviews can be conducted over emails with one or more media outlets. The media relations practitioner is expected to have the organizational emails and the official (or personal) email addresses of journalists, influencers, and bloggers as the need may be. This should be organized as his mailing list for his press releases. Some of the most popular free email clients include Yahoo, Hotmail, Google, Outlook e.t.c. users are required to sign up with any of the host choosing a unique username and password. However today, most organizations have their own domain names and their personalized emails on their own servers or rented servers. Using free public emails affects the public image of an organization and journalists may not see the organization as serious and official.

### 3.1.3 C. Social media

The term "social media" refers to the wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities (Dewing, 2010). The kinds of Internet services commonly associated with social media include but not limited to the following; blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, social network sites, status-update services, virtual world content, media-sharing sites. The most popular in Nigeria and the world is Facebook, created in 2004 and has 1.32 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2014, and 1.07 billion mobile monthly active users as of June 30, 2014 (Facebook, 2014). Some others include Twitter; allow people to share short updates about people or events and to see updates created by others (Fox, Zickuhr & Smith, 2009); YouTube; a video sharing site; Instagram, a picture sharing site and a whole host of other.

There are also some social media applications that media relations practitioners should be familiar with to effectively perform their duties. Oetting (2015) list some to include;

1. **Muck Rack** – a great resource for finding journalists by beat, location, the topics they cover, or things they have shared or tweeted online.
2. **Meltwater** – a PR and social media monitoring tool that allows managers to interact on social media, curate content, track competitors and emerging stories, and measures the result of their effort.
3. **Mention** – here, you input your organisation name or the executive's name or other information you want to monitor and the sources or the sites you want to monitor. You can get desktop or mobile notifications and emails when someone mentions the brand.
4. **Cision** – is a database that contains more than 1.6million journalists, influencers and editorial contacts. The platform provides advanced distribution, tracking and analyzing features to maximize PR value.
5. **Brand24** – this lets you track social mentions and sentiment online to better understand how a brand is being talked about and perceived. It also allows you to monitor the sentiment and mentions of competitors for a more realistic view of how a brand measures up.
6. **Anewstip** – is a search engine for finding journalists, influencers and media outlets that have recently mentioned a topic on Twitter.
7. **Agility** – is a product of PR Newswire to help you distribute and analyze the results of press releases. It has a global database of over 700,000 journalists, influencers and bloggers.

### 3.1.4 D. Blogs

Zarella (2010) defines a blog as a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks provided by the writer. Blogs provide a variety of social features, including comments, blog rolls, trackbacks and subscriptions that make it perfect for marketing purposes. Blogs also possess good

connection capabilities for other social media marketing efforts, due to the fact that they can be integrated into almost every other marketing tool and platform. In addition, most blogging applications enable an asynchronous interaction (e.g. posting comments or feedback) between the author, and the readers, the general public (Ndinojuo, 2014).

Bloggers hence are influencers; they are independent of the mainstream media and create a following for themselves. The media relations practitioner is expected to identify such influencers especially those that pertain to the organization he represents. You have political bloggers, sports bloggers, fashion bloggers, technology (tech) bloggers etc. Some of the most popular bloggers in Nigeria include Linda Ikeji Blog, Ogbonge Blog, 360Nobs, Techloy. Naijaloaded, YNaija, Bellanaija etc.

Sweetser et al. (2008) stated in their study that “readers are finding bloggers to be more trustworthy than traditional media, which is causing controversy in what the academic world considers credible” (p. 169).

### **3.2 Video News Releases (VNRs)**

Hanson (2005) defines video news releases as a tape or digitalized audio and video messages that serve as a press release to the broadcast and online media. The difference between news release and video news release is that video news release is accompanied with sound (Ikpe & Olise, 2010). With the availability of internet technology, Video News Releases have become easier; they could be emailed to journalists/bloggers, or posted on the organisation's website available to the public or also posted on the organisation's YouTube channel for viewers to watch. Videos sent to the media are always edited to suit their individual house style, the media relations practitioner, however, ensures that the most important message in the video are captured and also ensures that the video is not edited to pass unintended messages.

### **3.3 Videoconferencing**

This contemporary media relations tool according to Olise (2008) “allows for a live discussion between a group of people in different locations by the use of linked telephones and video screen” (p.237). The internet today allows for videoconferencing using a tool like Skype. Videoconferencing enables media relations practitioners to get linked with reporters and other media gatekeepers, to see and talk to each other from the convenience of their own conference Centre's or from meeting spaces, hotels, and offices other venues with the requisite video and telephone facilities. Ikpe and Olise (2010) informs that one of the earliest examples of the use of a technology that metamorphosed into videoconferencing in media relations was in 1982, when John and Johnson used the technology (videoconferencing) to reach hundreds of reporters in thirty cities breaking news and information about the Tylenol product tampering episode which cost the lives of seven people who ingested the tampered over-the counter medication (Straubhaar & LaRose, 2004).

### **3.4 Webcasting**

This is broadcasting on the net. In the era of organisations having a web site that provides information to the public about them, this is the first source of information for the media about an organization. Webcasting is a form of broadcasting production that incorporates streaming video and audio on the Internet. It is used to deliver a live press conference or event to the computer screen of the target audience. The organisation can live stream broadcasts on their own website or use YouTube broadcast on their channel.

In the case of media relations, a reporter or producer can watch from his or her desktop, laptop etc. viewing not only video but text and photos, participate in interviews if they are part of the package, then “download the Internet feed or run a tape to get excerpts for use in the on-air coverage (Straubhaar & LaRose, 2004).

### **3.5 Media Tours**

Organizations can organize media tours for journalists, influencers, and bloggers so that they can see for themselves what the company is doing and report firsthand through their various media their observations. Adamolekun (2001) explains that “public relations sourced news are always suspected because it is difficult to have an objective and straight to the point account of an organization's performance if its spokesperson is making the presentation” (p.80). On the other hand, the publics are more charitable and sympathetic with the news of a third party they have no reason to doubt his or her sincerity. Based on this, a media tour organized for the media gatekeepers (a third party) would boost the image of a company and eliminate negative stories about the company.

## **4. Challenges to adoption contemporary technologies in media relations practice in Nigeria**

Media relations practitioners globally, are now embracing new media due to the numerous benefits accruing from utilizing them and this has helped in effective media relations practice in this 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ikpe & Olise, 2010). The McLuhan global village has brought with it many challenges for organisations that normally

localized incidents get blown out of proportion and travel to the other end of the world. Such incidents if not properly managed tend to become PR nightmares for the organisation concerned and if their media relations is not top notch, it could be the downfall of the organisation or loss of reputation which is normally associated with loss of revenue, job cuts etc.

Unfortunately, because the new media tools are imports from developed countries, developing countries (like Nigeria) still lag behind in the development and utilization of new media in all spheres of life, media relations practice inclusive. Some of the factors responsible for this may include but not limited to high cost, corruption, cyber security, Low internet penetration in Nigeria, poor funding of media relations unit, the disregard for the management function of public relations, lack of training opportunities, poor power supply etc. which will be discussed below.

#### **4.1 High cost**

New technology means a faster way of communicating and usually with a hefty price tag. Digital equipment is expensive to purchase for organizations in Nigeria. Because we are a consuming and importing economy, which results in an unfavourable trade balance leading to a higher exchange rate of foreign currencies especially the United States dollar, the currency of international trade. The new technologies are already expensive even in their countries of development, factoring the high foreign currency exchange rates take such equipment and technologies out of the reach of many organisations with the need for them. Technologies include paid applications such as web hosting, paid subscriptions on YouTube, Facebook, Google and other firms that provide digital assistance over the internet. Owning and subscribing to these new media tools also come at a high maintenance cost or the organisation runs the risk of losing the already invested huge funds.

#### **4.2 Cyber security**

Cyber security is a global threat to the use of new media technologies in media relations because of data security and integrity. Information they say is power and if a rival organisation has all the future plans of a competitor, it is not good for the compromised organisation. This is further heightened for developing countries like Nigeria because a rival that has access to someone familiar with the protocol and codes of a rival organisation will do some damage to that organisation either by running countermeasures or by releasing such information to the public if it is one that will embarrass and harm the reputation of the rival organisation. There is also the possibility of errors comprising the security of an organisation or the threat of hackers who use devious means like sending virus, phishing, and scam emails to gain control and access to an organisations facilities and technologies.

Campbell, Martins & Fabos (2009) note that spam and spurious news are some of the problems associated with the internet. This among other related issues constitutes cyber crisis for effective media relations practice. Ikpe and Olise (2010) further add that in this new media age, a disgruntled employer or small/large group of people can smear the image of an organization by leaking controversial information on the internet. This, no doubt would affect effective media relations practice negatively. However, prompt response to any such information online is one of the fastest means of combating cyber security challenges. Wikileaks is a good global example of media agency through which such damaging information could leak out and in Nigeria, Sahara reporters and a host of bloggers are primary sources of leaks.

#### **4.3 Corruption**

Corruption is one of the major challenges against an effective practice of media relations in Nigeria and third world countries in general. Okafor (2002) highlights that “many forms of bribery were erroneously described as media / public relations practice adversely affected the integrity of the profession” (p.27). In Nigeria for instance, it is commonly believed that some media gatekeepers ask for ‘brown envelope’ in one way or the other before accepting stories and news release from organizations. In cases where they even accept such stories, the placement becomes another bottleneck. If they are not appropriately ‘settled’ they could decide to promote such stories during time slots that will generate the smallest amount of viewership. For example, running an organization’s release by 5:00 am instead of for example 4:00pm – 7:00pm when they know they have the most viewership. To tackle this issue, media gatekeepers must ensure that they operate within the confines of the ethics of their profession.

#### **4.4 Low internet penetration**

With the global digital revolution ongoing, their world countries like Nigeria still have a low internet penetration that is ranked at just 28% compared to countries like USA, UK, France, Germany, Australia who all have internet penetration rates above 75% (Ndinojuo, 2014).

Danaan (2006) is of the view that it will take less developed countries many decades to achieve a systematic, efficient and reliable application of new media technologies. However, since most underdeveloped countries have realized that virtually all new technologies are needed in all aspect of life, media relations practice inclusive, they have started to take bold steps by making policies that would encourage the acquisition and utilization of the various new media. This is seen the new plans introduced by telecommunication firms that are



meant to encourage organisations to subscribe to different corporate new media solutions and cheaper and subsidized rates.

#### **4.5 Poor funding of media relations unit**

Media relations should be seen as an investment. Unfortunately, most organizations tend to ignore the proper funding of media relations department especially for the acquisition of new media. Ikpe (2006) however asks “will some Nigeria organization be able to bear the cost of acquisition and maintenance of ICTs”? (p.146). Indeed, inadequate funding also contributed immensely to poor media relations practice in this era of new media technologies.

Apart from acquiring and maintaining of new media, media relations department need finance for both planning and implementing media relations which are not readily available in most developing countries.

#### **4.6 Disregard for the management function of public relations**

From the definition of public relations as postulated by Grunig and Hunt (1984) who view PR as the ‘management’ of communication between an organization and its publics. The management part of the function of public relations has been relegated that it affects how the PR practitioner carries out his duties one of which is maintaining a mutual understanding with the media i.e. media relations. Part of the problem that leads to underfunding of the PR unit is them not being consulted when critical decisions that could impact the organisation is being taken. The PR practitioners will now find themselves struggling to adjust to cuts in his budget thereby affecting the quality of his overall output.

#### **4.7 Lack of training opportunities**

It is essential that PR practitioners should be knowledgeable and experienced in the use of new media technologies for media relations. It is also important that media relations personnel should be exposed to training and retraining to refresh their ideas and be updated with changing technologies. Lack of exposure to training is one of the problems in government and private organisations in Nigeria. The government always has a no funding answer to questions of training and private organisations have the fear of staff asking for a pay rise or even going to other firms for better pay once they have been trained by another company. Eludu and Ndinojuo (2016) found out in their study that for a Nigerian government parastatals, staff were sent on ICT training; however, such training was limited and not adequately funded making it very competitive.

Okafor (2002) attributes this situation to the fact that early practitioners included people who rose through the rank and graduates from other disciplines like Marketing, Psychology, Sociology, Linguistics etc. who did not receive any formal training in either public relations or media relations to enable them function effectively in government and business organizations. Even those who read Public Relations are not knowledgeable in all the new media usage and are not constantly trained in this regard. Regular training is the key to overcoming this factor.

#### **4.8 Poor power supply**

Eludu and Ndinojuo (2016) opine that apart from a poor power supply, frequency of interrupted power cuts was a challenge that affects ICT use in an organisation. It could cause a loss in concentration, damage to equipment, and break in connection during a live event. In order to avoid this, most organisations in Nigeria make use of backup generators or solar powered electricity which increases overhead cost for the organization.

This has been an impediment to not just to media relations practice, but also the industrial and economic development in Nigeria. Successive governments have tried to reverse the power failure scourge with no progress. The power sector was privatized in Nigeria but there has been no improvement and even retrogression in some areas. The scale of this problem is so massive that at a time in 2016, power generation in Nigeria dropped to zero megawatts for a few hours.

All the above-mentioned factors if not appropriately checked can constitute a threat to the practice of media relations using contemporary media technologies.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper has been able to highlight prospects, relevance, and challenges facing the adoption of contemporary digital tools in media relations practice Nigeria. The challenges are quite disturbing and urgent advocacy from stakeholders; government agencies and parastatals, public relations practitioners, Non-Governmental Organizations, media organisations, corporate organisations and concerned individuals must all come together in order to redress these anomalies, in fact, all hands must be on deck to dig out of the hole that media relations practice finds itself in Nigeria. The current government canvassed its votes on the change mantra, we can only hope the change gets to positively impact public relations practitioners in their media relations function.

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